

Getting Past a Disappointment
Exodus 5:22-23

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I want to begin this morning with two verses in Exodus 5:22-23.

“So Moses returned to the LORD and said, ‘Lord, why have You brought trouble on this people? Why is it You have sent me? 23 For since I came to Pharaoh to speak in Your name, he has done evil to this people; neither have You delivered Your people at all.’”¹

Moses’ life is not going the way he thought it would! He has just experienced a major disappointment. And in these two verses we get an intimate glimpse into how he is responding to that disappointment. He asked God this question, *“Why is it You have sent me?”* I thought you were with me; I thought you had sent me to deliver these people from bondage. But none of that is happening. Instead my arrival here has actually made matters worse. Just want to let you know, God, all this is not working out the way we had talked about earlier!

Let’s go back and get a little context for the passage.² What were the events that led Moses to this point in life?

For the last 40 years Moses has been in the wilderness minding his own business. He has been doing the lowly job of tending to his father-in-law’s sheep. One day he is out shepherding the sheep and sees a bush in the distance that is on fire, but is not consumed by the fire. As Moses approaches the bush, God speaks to him, tells him to take off his shoes, because the ground he is standing on is holy ground. Then in Exodus 3 God tells Moses to go back to Egypt and tell Pharaoh to let His people go. Moses resists the call because he feels totally inadequate for the assignment. But God assures Moses that He will be with and enable him to deliver Israel out of the Egyptian bondage. So Moses obeys God. He goes to the elders in Israel and tells them of his experience. They go with Moses and tell Pharaoh that Jehovah has met with them and they are to go out in the dessert and sacrifice to the Lord.

Pharaoh’s response was not what they thought it would be.³ Instead of letting them go, he told them to get back to work. Worse than that, Pharaoh became even more oppressive; he started requiring them to gather their own straw in addition to making bricks. They thought life was going to get easier; instead, it got harder. The elders of Israel were very upset with Moses.

So now let’s come along side Moses and think about how he must have felt. *“First, God, I didn’t plan this strategy, You did. I just did what You told me to do. Second, I didn’t want the job to begin with. I told you I couldn’t do it. But You told me that You would be with me to make sure it all worked out. Well, it’s not working out down here very well. Not only is Pharaoh rejecting me; but now Israel is upset with me as well.”*

Listen to the content of Moses’ prayer, *“Lord, why have You brought trouble on this people? Why is it You have sent me? 23 For since I came to Pharaoh to speak in Your name, he has done evil to this people; neither have You delivered Your people at all.”*

I find two questions and two comments in that prayer.

Question one: *“Lord, why have You brought trouble on this people?”* This doesn’t make any

¹ All Scripture quotes are in New King James Version unless indicated otherwise.

² A working outline could be: (1) Occasion of this prayer (2) Content of this prayer (3) Answer to this prayer.

³ God had told Moses in Exodus 3:19 that Pharaoh would resist letting Israel go. However, we can see in Moses’ prayer that he is taken back by the way things are going. The response of the elders to him may have blindsided him.

sense. You have heard their cry. You have promised to make life better for them. What I see here is that life just got harder instead of better for them.

But, Moses cannot see the end from the beginning the way God can. We have read the Bible and we know that when all is said and done, God did exactly what He told Moses He would do. The same will always be true in our lives as well. You can take God's promises to the bank. He is faithful to His word. He does not tease us with promises of good things to come. It is His good pleasure to give us the kingdom. God cannot and will not lie. Everything He says He will do, He will do.

The problem Moses is experiencing concerns what it all looks like half way through the process. At this point the results are extremely disappointing: more trouble, instead of less trouble; Israelites are now being beaten for not making their quota. They had asked the Lord to give them favor with Pharaoh. Instead the wrath of Pharaoh has come down on them. What do you do when God's promises are simply not coming to pass? What do you do when life gets harder instead of easier? How do you handle that?

Here in our text Moses is talking to the Lord about that.

Question Two: "*Why is it You have sent me?*" For whatever reason, this is not working. Have you ever wanted to resign from the job God has given you to do? It's simply turned out to be a whole lot harder than you thought it would be. Out of your love for the Lord you were more than happy to step in and serve. But, the results have been disappointing. In fact, the results are so disappointing Moses wonders why God sent him on what seems to be a fruitless task.

Two statements Moses makes in this prayer.

Statement one: "*For since I came to Pharaoh to speak in Your name, he has done evil to this people...*" I see something about Moses in that statement that helps explain why God chose him. The statement is full of concern about God's people. Moses is focused on their need and their pain. Of course, we see that same quality over and over in Moses' leadership. Even in Exodus 32 when God spoke of destroying the whole nation, Moses put himself totally on the line for them in intercession and told God to blot out his name along with them if He would not forgive them (verse 32). So here is truly a man after God's own heart, more concerned for the people than himself.

Statement two: "*neither have You delivered Your people at all.*" God does not always give the results on the schedule or in the way we expect Him to do it. Ok, maybe we don't get everything we want today; but we should be seeing some progress here. Instead there is no deliverance going on "*at all.*"

After many years of pastoring, I have found that what people do in the hour of disappointment can define their future. Major disappointments are usually points of major decision in our lives. Both Ruth and Orpah suffered a major disappointment when their husbands died. However, they made very different choices and out of those choices experienced different futures. Orpah turned back to her pagan background. Ruth 1:15 tells us she went "*back to her people and to her gods....*" Ruth's response was different. She went to the covenant people of God and followed the Lord. We don't know anything else about Orpah's life after that; but we know that Ruth became the great-grandmother of King David (Ruth 4:14-17).

Think about Naaman's decision in 2 Kings 5. He had traveled a great distance to see the prophet Elisha and to be healed of his leprosy. He arrived at Elisha's house with great pomp and a full entourage with him. He expected⁴ the prophet to come out and call on the Lord and

⁴ Disappointment is the difference between expectation and reality. We have to process our disappointments in a healthy manner. Sometimes God shows us that our expectations were not realistic in the first place. If we will

wave his hand over Naaman and declare his healing. He was sorely disappointed when Elisha didn't meet him; he just sent a messenger telling him to go wash in the Jordan River seven times. Naaman's initial response to that disappointment almost cost him his life and his soul. Fortunately, one of his servants was able to reason with him. Naaman got past his anger, did what he was told to do, and was healed. That man's destiny was determined by how he responded to his disappointment with Elisha.

There are hundreds of people today in Springfield who would not darken the door of a church. Why, because they got disappointed with somebody at a church and decided they would never go back. Sad thing is they're cutting themselves off from a major source of life and encouragement. Some of those people's disappointment was with God rather than with people. They had an expectation of something God should do, and He didn't do it. Instead of realizing He might know something they don't know—instead, they passed judgement on God's character. And they pulled back from God as a response.

I have talked with many people who walked with God for a while, but He did not heal somebody they thought He should heal, He did not open ministry opportunities the way they thought He should, He did not answer a prayer—and they were offended. Out of that offense they drew back from the Lord and went their own way.

In the Parable of the Sower Jesus said that the seed that fell on the stony ground was those who *“heard the word, immediately receive it with gladness and they have no root in themselves and so endure but for a time: afterward, when affliction or persecution ariseth for the word's sake, immediately they are offended.”* (Mark 4:16-17 KJV). There is an increase of persecution against Christians in America. We don't know exactly where it goes from here; but even some Supreme Court justices have warned of it.⁵ If persecution comes, don't let it offend you. Don't let anything cause you to draw back from the Lord and His people.

When we go through a disappointment we are particularly vulnerable to making a bad decision. We may need to process the loss some before making major decisions. We may need the support of others in working through our feelings. One thing is of paramount importance. We must not draw back from the Lord as a response to our disappointment. The writer of Hebrews warned believers in the first century of that danger and then said, *“But we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul”* (10:39). We are of those who keep trusting the Lord through thick and thin. We are those who will continue in the faith and in obedience regardless of what we see happening around us. *“Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord”* (1 Cor 15:58).

Disappointment was probably a big factor in Judas' decisions. All the disciples, including Judas, were disappointed in the way Jesus was brought His kingdom rule into Judah. They thought Messiah would come as a powerful political figure. They thought He would throw off the Roman occupation and make them part of His administration. It didn't happen that way and by the time Jesus was crucified they were all disappointed. But Judas' response was different than all the rest. He not only turned from Jesus but against Him as well.

be honest in processing our disappointments, we may discover that we need some purifying of motive. Naaman needed to deal with some of the pride that was behind his assumptions.

⁵ See minority reports for June 26, 2015 ruling on same-sex marriage, especially Justice Clarence Thomas comments.

Cain was disappointed at God's response to his offering. Instead of receiving correction from the Lord, he developed a root of bitterness that led to murdering his brother.⁶

Israel in the wilderness was disappointed in their journey. They responded by murmuring and complaining. It's very tempting to do that when we're disappointed. But it is never a good idea. They failed to enter the Promise Land as a result of that response.⁷

So there are examples in Scripture of people who responded wrong to disappointment and there are examples of people who responded well.

I'm sure Joseph was disappointed in his brothers' response to his dream. As a starry-eyed teenager, he probably had no idea that he would be rejected by them and thrown into a pit. He did absolutely nothing to deserve that. It was not fair. Sometimes life is simply not fair! How will you respond to that? It wasn't fair when Potiphar's wife got him thrown into prison. All the injustice, all the disappointment, that came into Joseph's life made him better rather than bitter. For many years, he worked hard and got one disappointment after another. I'm sure his heart soared when the butler was brought out of prison just like Joseph had prophesied. Yet it was two long years before the butler mentioned him to Pharaoh. Disappointment did not break Joseph; it made him because he responded correctly to it.⁸

The issue is not whether disappointment will come. The issue is how you respond to it. Disappointment is actually an opportunity to draw even closer to God and let Him comfort you. Disappointment is often a process that purifies and matures our motives. Most Christians begin their journey thinking of God as their servant, rather than the other way around. We ask God for things we want and expect Him to jump at our requests. Over time and out of some experience with God we learn to offer ourselves as His servant and trust His good judgement as to what we need. Yes, we make our requests known unto God and we expect His goodness because He is good. But we do not behave like spoiled children who throw a fit when we don't get our way. We commit our soul to God and wait for Him to bring His good will to pass in our lives.

Jonah was disappointed that God did not bring his prophecy to pass and destroy Nineveh, even though they repented at his preaching. Jonah was more concerned about his own reputation as a prophet than the souls that he preached to. God taught Jonah compassion toward the lost.⁹ The disappointment became a context for him to address his own motives and learn from God.

So how do we get passed a disappointment?

(1) We go to God with the disappointment. He is the God of all comfort. If we need comfort He will supply it. If we need correction He will administer it with love and grace. If we need guidance, He will guide us. "*Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.*"¹⁰ That verse tells me that everyone of us is as close to God as we have chosen to be. When we draw near to God, He always does His part.

⁶ Genesis 4: End result was that Cain drew back from the Lord (Gen 4:16, "*Then Cain went out from the presence of the LORD...*").

⁷ Hebrews 3 and 4; 1 Cor. 10.

⁸ Genesis 37-41.

⁹ Based on New Testament references to Jonah, it is reasonable to assume Jonah received the correction from God. JONAH (from The New Unger's Bible Dictionary. Originally published by Moody Press of Chicago, Illinois. Copyright (c) 1988.)

¹⁰ James 4:8.

In Exodus 5 it's interesting to see the contrast between Moses' response to the disappointment verses the way the officers of Israel responded. Exodus 5:15 says the Israelite leaders "*cried out to Pharaoh*"; Exodus 5:22 tells us Moses went to the Lord in prayer. The officers of Israel tried to resolve their disappointment themselves. Moses went to the Lord with it.¹¹

(2) We are honest with God about how we feel.

Moses' prayer in our text is an honest exchange with God. He does not understand what is going on. His prayer is not an attack on God; it is an appeal for understanding and direction. God answers that prayer in the next verse with words of encouragement and guidance (Ex. 6:1-8).

The Psalms are full of honest prayers that David made during times of disappointment.

Ps 10:1 "*Why do You stand afar off, O LORD? Why do You hide in times of trouble?*"

In Ps 42:9 David says, "*I will say to God my Rock, 'Why have You forgotten me? Why do I go mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?'*" When asked in the right spirit, a question that begins with "why" is certainly ok with God. Do you have questions about what's going on in your life? Take it to the Lord in prayer. He has the answers; better yet, He is the answer.¹²

Abraham demonstrates the same honesty in his conversation with God in Genesis 15. "Where is this son you said you would give me?" God didn't get angry with Abraham. The man needed some encouragement and God gave him a fresh word of assurance.

(3) We remember that delay is not necessarily denial.¹³ The fact that it hasn't happened yet doesn't mean it won't happen. As Moses looked at his situation in Exodus 5, none of what God had promised him was happening. But it eventually did happen. God had told Abraham his seed would be as the stars of heaven and the sand of the earth, yet in Genesis 15 he didn't have one child, zero! It was years later before Ishmael and Isaac were born.

Disappointment can be defined as "the feeling of sadness or displeasure caused by the nonfulfillment of one's hopes or expectations."¹⁴

Hopes and expectations—the ability to envision a better tomorrow, the ability to dream a dream, the capacity to set a goal and look forward to its fulfillment is a gift from God. Imagine how boring life would be without hopes and expectations.¹⁵ Our motivations are rooted and grounded in those hopes and expectations. The alternative is apathy and indifference.

So we need to nurture our capacity to dream; we need to guard our outlook for tomorrow. Yes, "*Hope deferred makes the heart sick,*" Prov. 13:12 tells us. It's emotionally tough when we're not seeing the fulfillment of our heart's cry. But the rest of that proverb says, "*...when the desire comes, it is a tree of life.*" When God does bring the answer, it feels real, real good. "*Weeping may endure for a night, But joy comes in the morning*" (Ps 30:5).

¹¹ David was disappointed when he returned to camp at Ziklag in 1 Samuel 30. But he took his disappointment to the Lord, encouraged himself in the Lord, and received guidance from the Lord. By responding well to his disappointment, David was able to recover his family and the families of his men. Consider the response to disappointment of David's men; they were thinking of stoning David. God chose the right leader for that group.

¹² John 14:6.

¹³ God told Habakkuk, "*For the vision is yet for an appointed time; But at the end it will speak, and it will not lie. Though it tarries, wait for it; Because it will surely come, It will not tarry*" (Hab. 2:3).

¹⁴ Disappointment accessed 10/3/15 at https://www.google.com/webhp?sourceid=chrome-instant&rlz=1C1CHLA_enUS436US436&ion=1&espv=2&ie=UTF-8#q=Disappointment.

¹⁵ Paul talks about heaven in these terms: 1 Cor 13:13 "*And now abide faith, hope, love....*"

Working through disappointments in a healthy way protects our capacity to dream for tomorrow. We receive the healing and instruction we need from the Lord. Otherwise, our ability to receive fresh vision from the Lord can be hindered by the effects of the disappointment.

Identify as specifically as you can, exactly what you're disappointed about. Getting down to the nitty gritty in that way positions you to hear from the Lord what He may say about our motives, our expectations, His plans, etc. The Devil will send lying generalizations to your mind—lies designed to destroy your ability to enjoy life in the present and your anticipation of God's goodness in the future. He will tell you nothing is going to change. He will tell you nothing is going to work out. He will fill you with doubt and unbelief if you listen to him. But when we are specific about our disappointments, those kind of generalities get exposed. Remember God's thoughts toward you are good and not evil, to give you a future and a hope (Jerm. 29:11). Don't let disappointment fester; let God bring increased understanding and maturity as a result of it.

(4) We trust God's goodness and wisdom for our lives.

There may be some things He knows that you don't know.¹⁶ The goal that you're focused on may be less important than something greater that He is doing. God is the ultimate multi-tasker. He is working many things with many people all at once. If we are His and love Him, we can know this: He is *working all things together for our good*.¹⁷

Look at Joseph's life. It wasn't just about Joseph. It was about multitudes of people. Our vision of what needs to happen and what is happening is usually too narrow and too short-sighted. That's why Paul says in said in 2 Cor 4:16-18, "*Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. 17 For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, 18 while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.*"

(5) We continue in well-doing regardless of what we see or feel.

Gal 6:9 "*And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart.*"

My message to somebody today is continue. If you're tired and weary, continue anyway. If you don't feel like it, continue anyway. If the Devil tells you it does no good, continue anyway. If you're disappointed in the results, continue anyway. If you're being assaulted on the right and on the left, continue anyway. If nobody appreciates the sacrifices you're making, continue anyway. If there are disappointments along the way, continue anyway.

"...*he who endures to the end shall be saved*" (Matt. 24:13).

Pray

¹⁶ There were things going on behind the scenes (Job 1:6-12) that Job didn't know about. He was not able to see the whole picture, yet he did make this decision that served him well: "Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him..." (Job 13:15). Habakkuk didn't understand all that was going on in his life, but out of his disappointment came this revelation, "*The just shall live by faith...*" (Hab. 2:4).

¹⁷ Romans 8:28.